

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP) TENNESSEE 2003

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides cost share and incentive payments to plan and install conservation practices to protect, conserve, and improve soil, water and related natural resources.

Local work groups (LWGs) provide input to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, (NRCS) district conservationists to develop a listing of practices eligible for cost share and/or incentive payments. LWGs also provide input into the development of ranking criteria to be used to evaluate eligible applicants for approval of EQIP contracts.

The State Technical Committee provides input to the state conservationist to determine highest priority natural resource concerns and problems for which EQIP financial assistance will be utilized. Tennessee NRCS has conducted an extensive natural resource assessment utilizing National Resources Inventory (NRI) data, Tennessee Agricultural Statistics data, Census data, and other demographic information in order to determine the most significant natural resource concerns as follows: **Soil erosion/sustainability, improving management of grazing land, management and utilization of animal waste, and protection and improvement of surface and ground water quality.**

Tennessee is geographically divided into three distinct regions, based upon the major land resource areas, plant, soil, and animal resources, various agricultural enterprises, and their unique associated natural resource problems. Western Tennessee, consisting of 21 counties is the major row cropping area with 56% of the cropland. Soil erosion, soil quality, and soil sustainability with associated water quality and sedimentation are the major conservation concern. Middle Tennessee, consisting of 37 counties, had 52% of the grazing land, 35% of the confined livestock operations, and 50% of the non-confined livestock, and 40 % of the streams. Improving grazing land, management of animal waste, and protecting water resources is the high priority. East Tennessee consisting of 37 counties has 32% of the grazing land, 33% of the streams, 29% of the confined animal operations, and 40% of the farms. Management of livestock wastes, improving grazing land, and surface and groundwater protection are the major resource concerns.

Each geographic region has developed a list of practices eligible for cost share and/or incentive payments and has developed a ranking criteria designed to give highest priority to applicants who will install practices to address identified major resource concerns. Additionally, each region has developed a cost list by practice or component, as appropriate, that accurately reflects local costs and provides flexibility in development of contracts with participants. Maximum payments have also been established for certain practices, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, in order to **maximize environmental benefits.**

EQIP TENNESSEE 2003 CONTINUED, PAGE 2

The State Technical Committee recommends various changes to the state conservationist. In program year 2003, a base allocation of funds will be available in all counties in Tennessee. Fund allocations are monitored throughout the year to assure that all available funds are efficiently utilized. Historically, Tennessee has funded approximately 25-35% of its applicants.

A formula for the allocation of funds within the state is utilized to make the EQIP allocations within the state. The factors contained in the formula include cropland acres, cropland erosion, pastureland acres, pastureland condition, water resources/miles of streams, confined animal units, non-confined animal units, water resources/impacted streams, and number of farms. Allocations are made to the 3 geographic regions based on this formula and base amounts for each county are determined from within the geographical region.

CONTACT: DONALD L. DOTSON

EMAIL: ddotson@tn.nrcs.usda.gov

PHONE: 615 277 2567